

## ISRS expert spoke about the practical role of the establishment of the Council of Elders of Central Asia



At the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia, held on 16 November this year in Tashkent, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev put forward a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening regional cooperation. Particular attention was drawn to the proposal to establish a Council of Elders of Central Asia. For some, this initiative appears to be a return to traditional practices; for others, it represents a new format of regional diplomacy. What is the real substance of this proposal, and what practical role could it play in shaping the future of Central Asia? To address these questions, we turned to Akramjon Ilkhamovich Nematov, First Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

– The proposal put forward by the President of Uzbekistan to create a Council of Elders of Central Asia warrants particular attention, as it transcends standard institutional approaches and draws on the region's profound social and cultural foundations. It is not intended as a formalized body or an additional political layer, but as a return to time-tested mechanisms of social consensus that have historically underpinned stability and internal cohesion in Central Asian societies.

Traditionally, the institution of elders has played a central role in Central Asia as a means of preserving social harmony, mediating conflicts, and reaching broadly accepted decisions. Unlike formal legal frameworks, elders enjoyed legitimacy grounded in trust, wisdom, familiarity with local traditions, and broad societal recognition. This form of community-based arbitration proved instrumental in safeguarding societal stability during periods of political change, external pressures, and internal tensions.

Applying this logic at the regional level opens the way for a unique informal channel of inter-state

engagement, insulated from the pressures of short-term political dynamics, ideological divergences, and external interference. The Council of Elders would neither substitute for official institutions nor compete with state bodies; instead, it would complement them by providing a platform for confidential dialogue, where sensitive issues not yet ready for formal articulation could be addressed.

In terms of regional security, the Council of Elders has the potential to function as a mechanism of preventive diplomacy. Drawing on their moral authority and intimate knowledge of regional realities, its members could help detect early signs of escalation, contribute to de-escalation efforts, mediate in crisis situations, and put forward compromise solutions before tensions evolve into open confrontation. This model aligns with internationally recognized early-warning and conflict-prevention practices, while remaining deeply embedded in Central Asia's indigenous traditions.

The Council of Elders carries special significance in reinforcing regionalism as a "social adhesive." At a time when formal integration frameworks frequently encounter limitations stemming from sovereignty concerns, mistrust, and differing national priorities, informal institutions play a crucial role in maintaining a sense of shared identity, solidarity, and mutual responsibility. In this regard, the Council of Elders could act as a key vehicle for articulating and promoting regional values—good neighborliness, mutual respect, tolerance, compromise, and peaceful coexistence.

In addition, the consultative function of the Council of Elders supports more prudent and forward-looking policy choices. Grounded not in immediate political expediency, but in historical experience, cultural continuity, and awareness of societal attitudes, elders can provide guidance oriented toward the long-term and sustainable development of the region. This is especially important in addressing issues related to water and energy security, environmental pressures, migration, transport connectivity, and humanitarian cooperation.

It is essential to stress that the Council of Elders contributes to enhancing the legitimacy of regional cooperation in the public perception across Central Asian societies. By its very nature, it creates a sense of inclusion not only for political elites, but also for the peoples of the region in decision-making processes. As such, it serves as a bridge between states and societies, across generations, and between accumulated historical experience and future-oriented development strategies.

At the same time, regional sustainability is shaped not solely by formal agreements and institutions, but also by shared norms, values, identity, and established practices of interaction. In this context, the Council of Elders emerges as a mechanism for cultivating a Central Asian identity, reinforcing the understanding of the region as a space of shared history, common challenges, and a shared destiny.

Overall, the Council of Elders may be regarded as an instrument for strengthening the resilience and strategic agency of Central Asia—an integrated space bound together by a common historical legacy, shared challenges, and responsibility for a collective future. This is precisely where the strategic significance of the initiative lies.